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‘Unsharing’ sovereignty: g7+ and the politics of international statebuilding

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In order to work, international peace- and statebuilding has had to reshape the traditional notion of state sovereignty and legitimize increasingly interventionist endeavours in terms of an attenuated ‘shared’ sovereignty. Over the last decade, however, governments in recipient states have pushed back, demanding a more active role in negotiating with their OECD counterparts. The g7+ group, an international organization of now 20 self-proclaimed fragile states, has evolved as a key actor from the global South dealing with international peace- and statebuilding. The group’s approach to multilateral negotiations on development goals, and its creative use of donor concepts and approaches such as resilience, ownerships and measuring development progress, challenge the customary peace- and statebuilding practices. This challenge demonstrates that political elites in fragile states have started to self-confidentially occupy the arenas of statebuilding and development. This article argues that in so-doing the g7+ group establishes a post-liberal sovereignty claim that is based on two pillars: resilient nationhood, and selectivity in the application of global liberal principles. Since it relies on the development policy principle of national ownership, such post-liberal sovereignty is difficult to counter for actors subscribed to liberal norms. Effectively, sovereignty is ‘unshared’ again.

This article argues that the move induced by international statebuilding away from ‘sovereign but equal states’ towards forms of shared sovereignty with ‘fragile states’ is currently under a converse renegotiation. Fragile states are fighting back; and in doing so, rather than reasserting sovereign equality, they are using the very language and tools of western states by fashioning a new form of post-liberal discourse as a mode of co-optive resistance.

The g7+ group of self-proclaimed fragile states provides a striking example of this dynamic. Since its foundation in the late 2000s, the group has significantly influenced the international debate on peace- and statebuilding. Its membership currently comprises 20 states ‘that are or have been affected by conflict and are now in transition to the next stage of development’.¹ The organization has evolved as the main counterpart of the OECD donor states in development forums such as the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS). It currently plays a considerable role in the international bargaining on peace- and statebuilding goals, and is able to influence development debates in general, for example around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The voice currently raised by fragile states does not address the development realm alone.² It pierces to the very heart of international relations, particularly concerning interpretations of and approaches to state sovereignty. Its new prominence points towards a structural transformation in the global realm towards a fluid, multipolar setting: the increasing flexibility in picking and choosing international partners constitutes an emerging ‘global marketplace of political change’.³ The existence of such a marketplace undermines the foundations of global liberal governance, which rested on the supremacy of the OECD member states over the rest of the world. However,

¹ g7+, ‘Who we are’, 2016, <http://www.g7plus.org/en/who-we-are>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 8 Sept. 2017.) See also g7+, *g7+ Charter: “Pathways towards Resilience”* (Dili: g7+ Secretariat, 2016).

² Albert O. Hirschman, ‘Exit, voice, and the state’, *World Politics* 31: 1, Oct. 1978, pp. 90–107.

³ Thomas Carothers and Oren Samet-Marram, *The new global marketplace of political change* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015).

sovereignty's 'unsharing' is not just a consequence of a transformed international environment; it also relies on a distinctive post-liberal discourse.

This article's argument proceeds as follows. First, the conceptual idea of 'unsharing' sovereignty is positioned within the scholarly debate on state sovereignty and its contingent, relational nature. The second part engages with the shift in structural conditions that enables the process of 'unsharing', using the emergence and rise of the g7+ group as a key illustration. The suggestion is made that a new global marketplace of political change offers the potential for truly multipolar partnerships that undermine the former predominance of the OECD world. Furthermore, the current generation of international statebuilding,⁴ with its reference to context, resilience and hybridity, offers an auspicious entry point for Southern governments to contest the principles of global liberal governance. The trend among development actors to circumvent the governmental level in order to work with a trans-scalar 'local' is a challenge to which elites in states subject to peace- and statebuilding intervention need to respond. The formation of the g7+ group may be seen as an answer to this challenge.

In the third part of the article, the main elements of the g7+'s sovereignty discourse are unpacked. The enquiry is assisted by a systematic qualitative analysis of key policy documents from the organization itself, key political figures from its member states, and the IDPS.⁵ Drawing on this analysis, the article argues that the g7+ successfully uses the development principle of 'ownership' in order to turn the statebuilding relationship upside down. In so doing, it creates a new post-liberal notion of state sovereignty. The fourth and final part of the article discusses the substance of this sovereignty claim. It flexibly refers to international liberal norms, so it is not anti-liberal. Yet it deliberately adopts the reference to social context in current development discourse to make compliance with, and application of, liberal norms subject to the core political business of the 'resilience of the nation'. It is this reworking of the concept of ownership that gives the g7+'s sovereignty claim a distinctive post-liberal character.

'Sharing' sovereignty

Sovereignty in international law relies on the legal principle of non-interference.⁶ Traditional accounts in International Relations (IR) and diplomacy, in contrast, have commonly understood sovereignty not as a legal doctrine, but as a political, relational concept, albeit also relying on non-interference as its cornerstone.⁷ In this 'Westphalian sovereignty',⁸ the 'exclusive control within a given territory' was conceived of as the foundation of states that were 'autonomous and independent from each other',⁹ and thus formed the constitutive institution of IR and international

⁴ This generational approach follows Oliver P. Richmond, 'A genealogy of peacemaking: the creation and re-creation of order', *Alternatives* 26: 3, July 2001, pp. 317–48, and *A post-liberal peace* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 15. For a similar argument in the realm of statebuilding, see Jan Pospisil and Florian P. Kühn, 'The resilient state: new regulatory modes in international approaches to state building?', *Third World Quarterly* 37: 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 1–16.

⁵ The empirical analysis was conducted as a software-assisted qualitative content analysis of 20 policy documents, which are referred to in notes 76–7, 80–83, 85–93 and 95–107 below. While the selection is not all-encompassing, it contains all substantial statements of the organization since its inception. The documents were analysed through a two-stage process of structural coding, using the software NVivo.

⁶ See the definition given by Steinberger: 'State sovereignty in the sense of contemporary public international law denotes the basic international legal status of a state that is not subject, within its territorial jurisdiction, to the governmental, executive, legislative, or judicial jurisdiction of a foreign state or to foreign law other than public international law.' Harald Steinberger, 'Sovereignty', in Rudolf Bernhardt, ed., *Encyclopedia for public international law* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 2003), pp. 500–521 at p. 512.

⁷ J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, 'The state and the nation: changing norms and the rules of sovereignty in International Relations', *International Organization* 48: 1, Winter 1994, pp. 107–30 at pp. 109–10.

⁸ Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: organized hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 20–24.

⁹ Stephen D. Krasner, 'Think again: sovereignty', *Foreign Policy*, 20 Nov. 2009.

law.¹⁰ Weak states were ‘beneficiaries of non-competitive international norms’ such as sovereignty,¹¹ as even they fulfilled the elementary formal requirements,¹² namely international recognition and UN membership. Hence, they could exercise the international rights of independent states, notwithstanding their lack of governmental capacity.

During the Cold War, the two superpowers accepted the sovereignty principle at least as an important legal fiction,¹³ since it benefited both blocs.¹⁴ Immediately after the end of the Cold War, this situation changed with the rise of humanitarian interventionism and statebuilding in the early 1990s.¹⁵ At a global level, structural changes, especially the appearance of a multitude of non-state actors, challenged the state’s role as the predominant source of authority.¹⁶ Moreover, efforts towards international conflict resolution and statebuilding increased significantly, both because of a perceived rise in internal violent conflict,¹⁷ and because the post-Cold War environment facilitated expansive forms of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and even international administration. These endeavours depend on the exact opposite of Westphalian sovereignty: the endorsement of outside interference. Ironically, the UN system rests on both pillars—state sovereignty, and international intervention in the name of peace. How to negotiate this contradiction, as Kalevi Holsti called it even before the heyday of humanitarian interventionism,¹⁸ is ‘the ultimate question’ facing the international system.

Responses to this question, driven by the protagonists of interventionist politics, were actively propounded in the late 1990s. Sovereignty came to be reconfigured as state responsibility was increasingly paired with state capacity.¹⁹ As early as 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty highlighted the responsibility issue in its famous report on the ‘Responsibility to Protect’. Referring to the UN Charter, the report called for ‘a necessary re-characterization . . . from sovereignty as control to sovereignty as responsibility in both internal functions and external duties’.²⁰ Hence, sovereignty was no longer a protection against outside interference, but a ‘shared responsibility’ that had to be constantly proven by behaviour compliant with the expectations of the dominant global powers.²¹ If it were not, the ‘international community’

¹⁰ Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; first publ. 1977), p. 8.

¹¹ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: sovereignty, international relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 24.

¹² See Kalevi J. Holsti, *The state, war, and the state of war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 61–81.

¹³ Pierre-Marie Dupuy, Matthias Herdegen and Gregory H. Fox, ‘Comments on chapters 4 and 5’, in Michael Byers and Georg Nolte, eds, *United States hegemony and the foundation of international law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 176–94 at pp. 178–9.

¹⁴ See e.g. Barkin and Cronin, ‘The state and the nation’, p. 125.

¹⁵ Barkin and Cronin, ‘The state and the nation’, pp. 125–8.

¹⁶ See e.g. Neil Walker, ed., *Sovereignty in transition* (Haywards Heath: Hart, 2006).

¹⁷ See e.g. Mary Kaldor, *New and old wars: organized violence in a global era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

¹⁸ Holsti, *The state, war, and the state of war*, p. 202.

¹⁹ There are also historical precursors that refer to sovereign responsibilities: see Luke Glanville, ‘The antecedents of “sovereignty as responsibility”’, *European Journal of International Relations* 17: 2, June 2010, pp. 233–55.

²⁰ International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001), p. 13. See also Francis Mading Deng et al., *Sovereignty as responsibility: conflict management in Africa* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1996); Philip Cunliffe, ‘Sovereignty and the politics of responsibility’, in Christopher J. Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe and Alexander Gourevitch, eds, *Politics without sovereignty: a critique of contemporary International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 39–57; Adrian Gallagher, ‘The promise of pillar II: analysing international assistance under the Responsibility to Protect’, *International Affairs* 91: 6, Nov. 2015, pp. 1259–76; Kirsten Ainley, ‘The Responsibility to Protect and the International Criminal Court’, *International Affairs* 91: 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 37–53; Ramesh Thakur, ‘The Responsibility to Protect at 15’, *International Affairs* 92: 3, May 2016, pp. 415–34.

²¹ Amitai Etzioni, ‘Sovereignty as responsibility’, *Orbis* 50: 1, Winter 2006, pp. 71–85 at p. 74.

would be required to enforce responsibility, ultimately even by military means, with or without consent from the non-responsible state. In this way, external military intervention in internal matters could even become an obligation derived from sovereignty.²²

Even if, in most cases, interveners could construct legal authorization for the use of force through UN Security Council resolutions and mandates, Westphalian sovereignty interpreted in a strict sense became a fragile and contested construct and lost its purchase as a global norm.²³ While such challenges have been posed before, for instance during the debt crisis of the 1980s,²⁴ this time the asserted obligation to intervene transformed sovereignty's normative content itself. Stephen Krasner's famous notion of sovereignty as an 'organized hypocrisy' needs to be understood against this background:²⁵ realists in the field of IR, like himself, struggled to cope with the concept's ongoing renegotiation.

Humanitarian interventionism and international statebuilding thus led to a reworking of traditional understandings of sovereignty. In particular, statebuilding had begun to link validation of external sovereignty, requiring non-interference, with the internal side of sovereignty—the idea that sovereignty derives from a relationship with one's citizens that legitimates central state authority.²⁶ In the process, a conditional sovereignty was established that involved a 'dual responsibility of the state towards other members of international society on the one hand, and its own citizens on the other'.²⁷ Sovereignty itself became 'shared'.²⁸

The radically expanded idea of sovereign responsibility opened up contradictions with post-colonial sovereignty claims by the states subject to intervention. They, in turn, linked the principle of non-interference to arguments based on specific historical experiences and conditions, as well as to the quest for alternative forms of social organization and political orientation.²⁹

More often than not, when confronted by such claims, international actors saw sovereignty as 'the problem rather than the solution'.³⁰ Despite upholding principles of ownership and development partnership, the international donor community has never been interested in aid recipients themselves playing too active a role.³¹ Nonetheless, it remains vital that developing states formally retain control. This is important for both sides: it enables international partners to display their

²² See S. Neil MacFarlane, Carolin J. Thielking and Thomas G. Weiss, 'The Responsibility to Protect: is anyone interested in humanitarian intervention?', *Third World Quarterly* 25: 5, 2004, pp. 977–92 at p. 981.

²³ See Barkin and Cronin, 'The state and the nation', p. 128; Alex Bellamy, 'A chronic protection problem: the DPRK and the responsibility to protect', *International Affairs* 91: 4, July 2015, pp. 225–44; Derek Averre and Lance Davies, 'Russia, humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: the case of Syria', *International Affairs* 91: 4, July 2015, pp. 813–34.

²⁴ Jackson, *Quasi-states*, pp. 124–31; David Scott, 'The aftermaths of sovereignty: postcolonial criticism and the claims of political modernity', *Social Text*, no. 48, Fall 1996, pp. 1–26 at p. 12.

²⁵ Krasner, *Sovereignty*.

²⁶ John Gerard Ruggie, 'Review. Continuity and transformation in the world polity: toward a neorealist synthesis', *World Politics* 35: 2, Jan. 1983, pp. 261–85 at p. 276.

²⁷ Dominik Zaum, *The sovereignty paradox: the norms and politics of international statebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4.

²⁸ The notion of 'shared sovereignty' developed in the policy debate on the status of Kosovo; see International Commission on the Balkans, *The Balkans in Europe's future* (Sofia: Centre for Liberal Strategies, 2005), p. 18; cf. James R. Hooper and Paul R. Williams, 'Earned sovereignty: the political dimension', *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 31: 3, 2002–03, pp. 355–72; David Chandler, *Empire in denial: the politics of state-building* (London: Pluto, 2006).

²⁹ Scott, 'The aftermaths of sovereignty', p. 11.

³⁰ David Chandler, *International statebuilding: the rise of post-liberal governance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 45; cf. also p. 64: 'The paradigm of international statebuilding presupposes a different and non-rights-based framing of international regulations of the post-colonial state.'

³¹ Louise Andersen, 'What to do? The dilemmas of international engagement in fragile states', in Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller and Finn Stepputat, eds, *Fragile states and insecure people? Violence, security, and statehood in the twenty-first century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 21–43 at pp. 31–4.

proclaimed altruism, and maintain the sovereignty-based international system, since the principle as such applies to them as well and thus needs to be upheld; for developing states, this pretence is equally essential, since their ruling elites' internal legitimacy depends on the international recognition of their role and of the states they are running.³²

Developments in the post-Cold War era have thus rendered sovereignty not a fixed attribute of statehood,³³ but an attribute that is contingent and dependent upon perceptions and practices.³⁴ David Chandler depicts this transformation as the distinction between autonomy and sovereignty in statebuilding: to bring the latter in line with the goal of liberal expansion, the former had to be overcome. Sovereignty was accordingly 'reinterpreted as the institutional mechanism through which the dangers of autonomy can be ameliorated'.³⁵ Military intervention and peacekeeping missions could thus be legally mandated by the UN while preserving 'the formal trappings of sovereignty'.³⁶

According to this logic, cases in which a state does not have at its disposal the capacities (or willingness) to act responsibly constitute a 'sovereignty gap'.³⁷ This gap needs to be filled by international support. For years, development actors considered this to be a technical issue of lacking state capacity, and addressed it by applying 'good governance'.³⁸ In the light of a noticeable absence of success, they changed their approach in the late 2000s towards a stronger focus on community-based interventions. From now on, policy design should be informed primarily by the local context, not by blueprints derived from international development frameworks. Concepts such as 'resilience' or 'inclusive political settlements', which began to appear in development discourse at that time, signpost this shift.

The willingness of international actors to actively engage with local and informal power settings while circumventing formal state institutions shows their disillusionment with attempts to establish a liberal order in fragile contexts.³⁹ This so-called 'local turn' supplemented shared sovereignty from above with a form of sometimes contradictory, non-territorial shared sovereignty from below.⁴⁰ This time sovereignty was shared by establishing a direct relationship between international actors and citizens or communities, in the guise of a relationship of trust that was absent between local populations and the state.

The emergence of the g7+

The emergence of the g7+ as the first organized assembly of self-proclaimed fragile states has to be understood against the background of the shared sovereignty trend. The group was born in the course of the consultations during the High-level Forums on Aid Effectiveness, sponsored by the OECD, which established the IDPS. Initiated by the governments of Timor-Leste and the Democratic

³² See Nathaniel Berman, 'Intervention in a "divided world": axes of legitimacy', in Hilary Charlesworth and Jean-Marc Coicaud, eds, *Fault lines of international legitimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 115–46 at pp. 144–5.

³³ Janice E. Thomson, 'State sovereignty in International Relations: bridging the gap between theory and empirical research', *International Studies Quarterly* 39: 2, June 1995, pp. 213–33 at p. 219.

³⁴ Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, 'The social construction of state sovereignty', in Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, eds, *State sovereignty as social construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–22 at p. 12.

³⁵ Chandler, *International statebuilding*, pp. 46–7.

³⁶ Chandler, *International statebuilding*, p. 55.

³⁷ Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing failed states: a framework for rebuilding a fractured world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 83.

³⁸ Chandler, *International statebuilding*, p. 48.

³⁹ Cf. Christine Bell, *What we talk about when we talk about political settlements: towards inclusive and open political settlements in an era of disillusionment*, PSRP working paper no. 1 (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2015).

⁴⁰ Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, 'The local turn in peace building: a critical agenda for peace', *Third World Quarterly* 34: 5, June 2013, pp. 763–83.

Republic of the Congo, the first meeting gathered representatives from, besides those two countries, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti and Sierra Leone.⁴¹

The new organization clearly defined its goal from the outset: to (re-)establish the voice of government elites against the threat of an increasing focus on the local in international interventions. 'The g7+ symbolizes the first time in history that we, as fragile states, have a voice in shaping global policy, advocating our own country-led and country-owned transitions out of fragility.'⁴² The question of national ownership of development cooperation—in contrast to the ownership of the development process by beneficiaries themselves—was brought back to the table. The 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States' was the first major outcome of this process.⁴³

Given the strong sentiments of self-critique that accompanied the local turn in the peace- and statebuilding community, it is unsurprising that the initiative was widely welcomed in policy and academic circles. Benevolent analysts and practitioners alike asserted that the group would present 'an important new voice' that 'carries high expectations'.⁴⁴ Oliver Richmond, for example, interpreted the g7+ as an innovation of hybrid peacebuilding, as it 'brought to the fore the notion that societies and their elites also build peace and states, not just donors or state elites'.⁴⁵

The importance of the g7+, and the recognition it has gained, have grown rapidly: internationally, where the group has played a substantial part in the negotiations on the SDGs,⁴⁶ but also among the target group of fragile states. Its membership figure—despite recurring managerial problems—has risen from the initial seven to 20 states.⁴⁷ The g7+ is now an established and formalized international organization with an alternating chair, a standing secretariat and regular ministerial meetings.⁴⁸ A recent review study confirms its influence on international policy-making even beyond the IDPS.⁴⁹

The evolution of the g7+ was also enabled by, and has in turn contributed to, a significant change in international conditions towards what Thomas Carothers and Oren Samet-Marram have called the 'global marketplace of political change'.⁵⁰ The western model of governance 'now faces serious competition from alternative, non-western models in the eyes of power holders and publics in different parts of the world'.⁵¹ The emergence of this global marketplace is being fostered by a

⁴¹ Vanessa Wyeth, 'Knights in fragile armor: the rise of the "g7+"', *Global Governance* 18: 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 7–12 at p. 8; g7+, *Strength in fragility: "we are writing our own history"—the emergence of the g7+ group from our own perspective* (Dili: g7+ Secretariat, 2016), p. 10.

⁴² Emilia Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds: the g7+ leads the way*, USAID Frontiers in Development report (Washington DC: the US Agency for International Development [USAID], 2012), p. 5.

⁴³ IDPS, 'A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States', signed at the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (Busan, South Korea, 30 Nov. 2011); henceforth the 'New Deal'. For the history of the New Deal, see Tobias Nussbaum, Eugenia Zorbas and Michael Koros, 'A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States: analysis', *Conflict, Security and Development* 12: 5, Nov. 2012, pp. 559–87.

⁴⁴ Wyeth, 'Knights in fragile armor', p. 7.

⁴⁵ Oliver P. Richmond, *Failed statebuilding: intervention and the dynamics of peace formation* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 163.

⁴⁶ This is confirmed by a recent independent review of the New Deal, which highlights the largely successful efforts of the g7+ in building negotiation coalitions: see Sarah Hearn, *Independent review of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* (New York: New York University, 2016), p. 24. See further Kaifala Marah, 'The g7+ global perspectives on the Sustainable Development Goals', public address by the chair of the g7+, Dili, Timor-Leste, 21 Sept. 2015, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Besides the initial seven members, these are Burundi, Chad, Comoros, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Togo and Yemen. Records on which countries are founding members vary, as the g7+ website—in contrast to Wyeth, 'Knights in fragile armor'—lists Liberia and South Sudan in this category, but not the Central African Republic and Cote d'Ivoire.

⁴⁸ g7+, *g7+ Charter*.

⁴⁹ Hearn, *Independent review of the New Deal*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Carothers and Samet-Marram, *The new global marketplace of political change*.

⁵¹ Carothers and Samet-Marram, *The new global marketplace of political change*, p. 30.

deliberate strategy of multipolarity applied by actors such as China.⁵² Other so-called ‘new donors’,⁵³ along with wealthy partners such as the Gulf states, provide substantial and effective funding alternatives that openly compete with those provided by the OECD donors. The multiplicity of actors that are nowadays actively involved in fragile states offers government elites the opportunity to choose alliances flexibly and on the basis of particular issues. Such a fluid form of multipolarity sweeps away the carrots and sticks of liberal interventionism, and opens up considerable political space beyond traditional donor–recipient relationships. This global marketplace of competing actors thus provides the necessary material conditions for the g7+’s sovereignty claim.

Notwithstanding the changing structural conditions, OECD donors, at least rhetorically, display a high level of trust and commitment towards the g7+. Whereas the group is not able to substantially alter the concrete modes of aid delivery, it is able to generate influence on the general level of the international discourse.⁵⁴ This is attributable to two factors. The first is its highly effective public relations work, particularly by the government of Timor-Leste which also contributes the bulk of funding.⁵⁵ Its history and its international role render this country well placed to take on a leading role within the organization. Timor-Leste has also the personal capacity to do so: its Finance Minister, Emilia Pires, who acted as the first chair of the g7+ and quickly became the organization’s international face, was—and still is—a key driver of the process.⁵⁶

Second, the g7+ is hitting the right tone at the right time at international development gatherings. Thus the OECD partners in the IDPS explicitly link the presence of ‘countries affected by conflict and fragility’ with the opportunity ‘to identify, agree and realize more effective ways of supporting transitions out of fragility and building peaceful states’.⁵⁷ Statements by g7+ advisers and like-minded observers are even more pointed. Simon Fenby, senior adviser to the former Prime Minister of Timor-Leste Xanana Gusmão, frames the responsibility of g7+ governments as a normative claim: ‘It can . . . be readily appreciated that the leaders of fragile states might be preoccupied with questions of state building and peace building as this is arguably their primary responsibility as national leaders.’⁵⁸

Further support comes from academic voices, especially those arguing from a post-colonial position. Lindsay Whitfield and Alastair Fraser, for example, ‘advance a normative case for the right of African governments to define their own policies which is grounded in the notion of “popular sovereignty”, a concept imbued with the values of self-determination, democracy, and non-racialism’.⁵⁹ Such accounts presume a remarkably high level of public participation and representation in fragile states. The assumption that governments will act in the spirit of ‘national leadership’ and in the sense of

⁵² Denis M. Tull, ‘China’s engagement in Africa: scope, significance and consequences’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44: 3, Sept. 2006, pp. 459–79.

⁵³ See e.g. Ngaire Woods, ‘Whose aid? Whose influence? China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance’, *International Affairs* 84: 6, Nov. 2008, pp. 1205–21; Lei Yu, ‘China’s strategic partnership with Latin America: a fulcrum in China’s rise’, *International Affairs* 91: 5, Sept. 2015, pp. 1047–68.

⁵⁴ This is confirmed by interviews in the donor realm: UK Department for International Development (DFID), Aug. 2017; Austrian Development Cooperation, July 2017.

⁵⁵ g7+, *Annual Report 2014–2015* (Dili: g7+ Secretariat, 2015), p. 20.

⁵⁶ For example, Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, is an appraisal of the g7+ published by USAID.

⁵⁷ OECD, ‘International Dialogue and Partnership’, 2012, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance-peace/conflictandfragility/internationaldialogueandpartnership.htm>.

⁵⁸ Simon Fenby, ‘The g7+ group of fragile states: towards better international engagement and accountability in aid delivery to fragile nations’, in Damien Kingsbury, ed., *Critical reflections on development* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 33–49 at p. 41; see also Wyeth, ‘Knights in fragile armor’.

⁵⁹ Lindsay Whitfield and Alastair Fraser, ‘Introduction: aid and sovereignty’, in Lindsay Whitfield, ed., *The politics of aid: African strategies for dealing with donors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–26 at p. 6.

‘popular sovereignty’ ignores the usually problematic shape of the underlying political settlement which renders these states fragile in the first place.

The key element introduced to safeguard against a government dominance in the New Deal was meant to be the substantial inclusion of civil society, especially in country assessments and in negotiating what the New Deal calls ‘one national vision and one plan’.⁶⁰ The framework outlined guarantees the participation of national civil society organizations in the assessment exercise and the subsequent negotiation of a country compact.⁶¹ Yet implementation reveals a mixed picture, with particular problems in some countries.⁶² South Sudan represents a well-documented case that highlights the substantial problems associated with such inclusivity. The in-country process was rushed and dominated by international consultants embedded in government ministries.⁶³ Most players outside the dominant faction of the elite settlement were not present at the consultations, which therefore led to absurdly optimistic results.

Just a few months after the fragility assessment estimated that the country would have already entered a ‘rebuild and reform’ stage, elite power politics took over and a civil war broke out. This left civil society actors disillusioned: ‘The politics of the day however did not allow room for compromise on peace building and state building issues with any other stakeholders except those internal actors that wielded military power and have the potential of destabilizing the territorial authority and control of the government.’⁶⁴

International monitoring also suggested that the inclusion instituted under the New Deal remained superficial. Even the official IDPS monitoring report admitted that while, in general, the involvement of ‘national stakeholders, including civil society’ in fragility assessments had taken place, ‘the length and extent of the consultations varied’.⁶⁵ The independent review of the IDPS confirms these findings.⁶⁶

Resilience, solidarity, self-measurement: the discourse of the g7+

Irrespective of these practical issues, the g7+ has changed the way state sovereignty is understood and negotiated in countries subject to international statebuilding. Since its emergence, the organization and its members have established a unique discourse that disrupts the narrow realm of donor–recipient relationships. Its message is predominantly directed to the ‘international community’,⁶⁷ which reads as very vague, but offers opportunities to flexibly connect and apply its claims to audiences beyond the obvious target group of the OECD countries. Recent g7+ documents do not even mention the IDPS, an omission that supports some donors’ perceptions that the g7+ wants to be seen as an independent international organization that reaches beyond the donor realm.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ IDPS, ‘A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’, p. 2.

⁶¹ Hafeez Wani and Aisha Jore Wani, *The New Deal implementation in South Sudan: a South Sudanese civil society perspective paper* (Juba: Civil Society Organization [CSO] Working Group, 2015), p. 6.

⁶² Interviews with DFID, Aug. 2017; Austrian Development Cooperation, July 2017. The interviewees acknowledged that the New Deal and the Peace and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) are generally perceived by donors as a useful framework, but not in cases in which the government of the partner country is ‘not willing to play a constructive role’.

⁶³ Wani and Wani, *The New Deal implementation in South Sudan*, pp. 10, 12.

⁶⁴ Wani and Wani, *The New Deal implementation in South Sudan*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ IDPS, *New Deal monitoring report 2014* (Nov. 2014), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Hearn, *Independent review of the New Deal*, p. 45; see also Jacob Hughes et al., *Implementing the New Deal for Fragile States*, policy paper 2014-02 (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2014), p. 7.

⁶⁷ g7+, ‘g7+ statement, Dili, 10 April 2010’, p. 1, <http://www.g7plus.org/en/resources/g7-statement-dili-10-april-2010>.

⁶⁸ See e.g. the g7+ charter, which does not mention the IDPS at all (confirmed by interview with DFID, Aug. 2017).

In this undertaking, the language of the g7+'s discourse is more important than the organization's actual influence in directing donor intervention. As has always been the case with sovereignty claims, it would be difficult to trace any direct measurable impact on state behaviour. But discourse as a theatre of contestation is the main arena for structural claims that then alter the political space for external intervention. The discourse makes effective use of donor wording, and relies on the donor's self-critical awareness of a lack of 'ownership'.⁶⁹ Presenting the New Deal's agenda in terms of a quest for country ownership not only resonates with the non-interference approach of new donors such as China;⁷⁰ it puts severe constraints on any political involvement by international partners. Thus it enables the g7+ members to prolong international assistance while keeping at bay interventions aimed at circumventing the national political level.

Three elements are constitutive in this respect. First, the discourse creates a specific notion of 'resilience' that takes the nation rather than the individual or local community as its central reference point. Second, the discourse calls for an unconditional solidarity that resonates with, but also transforms, the older paradigm of post-colonialism. Third, the discourse raises the ownership question with reference to donor demands to measure progress, in a way that essentially promotes 'self-measurement'. The emphasis on these three elements is a deliberate response to the current crisis in statebuilding. It is significant, yet ironic, that recipient countries use the concepts that indicate this crisis—in particular resilience, conditionality and local ownership⁷¹—for their own strategic interests. By adjusting both the concepts and their content, the g7+ has turned them into cornerstones of its quest to transform and renew state sovereignty in a fashion that takes it away from the shared sovereignty that sought to limit the power of its members. In the following sections, the three pillars of the g7+'s sovereignty discourse are unpacked.

Resilience

For the OECD, resilient states are characterized in two different ways: on the one hand, they 'are capable of absorbing shocks and transforming and channelling radical change'; on the other hand, they have certain structural characteristics, first and foremost the 'capacity and legitimacy of governing a population and its territory'.⁷² As David Chandler points out, these two elements, when emphasized by donors, enable 'the rationalisation and legitimisation of a broad range of external policy interventions in the societal sphere', which in turn implies a radical expansion of 'interventionist practices' to the social realm.⁷³ Resilience substitutes for the liberal ideas of building a state and its institutions 'local capacities, practices, and understandings' as 'the means and the ends of intervention'.⁷⁴ Current applications of resilience in statebuilding hence complement ongoing top-down efforts in institution-building with bottom-up approaches focusing on particularly vulnerable communities.

Both aspects—the focus on the social realm and the avoidance of top-down processes in statebuilding—create existential challenges for elitist political settlements. Their main stronghold at the international level, the formal, institutionalized state and its central organizations, is at risk of

⁶⁹ See David Booth, 'Aid effectiveness: bringing country ownership (and politics) back in', *Conflict, Security and Development* 12: 5, Nov. 2012, pp. 537–58 at p. 553.

⁷⁰ Fahimul Quadir, 'Rising donors and the new narrative of "South–South" cooperation: what prospects for changing the landscape of development assistance programmes?', *Third World Quarterly* 34: 2, April 2013, pp. 321–38 at p. 334.

⁷¹ Richmond, *Failed statebuilding*, p. 140.

⁷² OECD, *Supporting statebuilding in situations of conflict and fragility*, policy guidance (Paris, 2011), p. 21.

⁷³ David Chandler, 'International statebuilding and the ideology of resilience', *Politics* 33: 4, Dec. 2013, pp. 276–86 at p. 284.

⁷⁴ David Chandler, 'Resilience and the "everyday": beyond the paradox of "liberal peace"', *Review of International Studies* 41: 1, Jan. 2015, pp. 27–48 at p. 48.

becoming neglected. The g7+ adopts resilience as its main vision, through the motto 'pathways toward resilience'.⁷⁵ Yet, while still accepting the theoretical part of the OECD's definition, the g7+ counters it with a notion of resilience that ties it to a teleological idea of nationhood: 'Resilience refers to the ability of social institutions to absorb and adapt to the internal and external shocks and setbacks they are likely to face. Fragility thus implies that the consolidation of nationhood, and the safety, security and well-being of the citizens are at risk of a relapse into crisis or violent conflict. This risk is gradually reduced as the institutions develop the necessary ability to cope with the type of threats they are exposed to.'⁷⁶

This definition intrinsically links resilience to the evolution of a nation. At first glance, this seems to resemble the 'resilient nations' slogan that multilateral development actors such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have been using since the early 2010s.⁷⁷ However, the concept is turned upside down: nationhood in the meaning put forward by the g7+ is presented as a given; resilience, in turn, becomes a key aspect of its consolidation. Consistently with this interpretation, those who are to benefit from safety, security and well-being are 'citizens' or the state's people, and not communities or populations.⁷⁸ The reference to citizenship, despite the term's being a constitutive element of political liberalism, is not meant to embrace a liberal polity; on the contrary, it is intended to emphasize the unchallengeable role of the state.⁷⁹

Such a reframing has two implications. First, on the ideological level, resilience in this meaning underlines that the concern of the g7+ governments is with 'the development of the nations of its members',⁸⁰ and with 'the national sovereignty of its members'.⁸¹ The focus of this concern is not the resilience of the nation as a social dimension of a democratic state, but the resilience of the sovereign nation-state at the level of international relations, and as a key tool for elite dominance of the social playing field. In a paradoxical move, resilience is turned into a sovereign vision.

Second, on the pragmatic level, resilience is tied to the development policy principle of national ownership. References such as the request for 'country-led resilience strategies based on country-owned assessment' confirm this.⁸² While such a request might sound logical and in line with donor interests, it has one main goal: to prevent any potential circumvention of the central state by international interventions.⁸³ Resilience as defined by the g7+ rejects any bottom-up perspective on the grounds of nationhood claims. From being one of the main conceptual tools for implementing the local turn in peace- and statebuilding, resilience is transformed into one of the main roadblocks against it. 'Statebuilding means that donors can no longer bypass our state institutions, weakening our ownership and hindering our nations from building the institutions and capacity necessary for strong bureaucracies to serve the needs of our people.'⁸⁴

⁷⁵ g7+, *g7+ Charter*, title page.

⁷⁶ g7+, 'Note on the Fragility Spectrum. Launched in Kinshasa, DRC', 2013, <http://www.g7plus.org/en/resources/g7-statement-dili-10-april-2010>.

⁷⁷ 'Empowered lives. Resilient nations' is currently the main motto of the UNDP.

⁷⁸ g7+ introductory brochure, 2015, <http://www.g7plus.org/sites/default/files/resources/Intoduction-of-g7%2B-Brochure.pdf>.

⁷⁹ On a more technical level, the role of the state is emphasized by the need of the controlling role of governments in channelling aid. See g7+, *Aid instruments for peace- and state-building: putting the New Deal into practice* (Dili: g7+ Secretariat, 2016), pp. x–xi.

⁸⁰ Fenby, 'The g7+ group of fragile states', p. 42.

⁸¹ g7+, 'The Haiti Declaration', Port-au-Prince, 14 Nov. 2012, p. 1, <http://www.g7plus.org/sites/default/files/resources/The-Haiti-Declaration.pdf>.

⁸² Habib Ur Rehman Mayar, 'g7+ policy update: on the way to resilience', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 9: 1, May 2014, pp. 95–9 at p. 96.

⁸³ For example, g7+, 'Note on the Fragility Spectrum', p. 2; Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, pp. 5–6.

Solidarity

A strong appeal to solidarity between member states is the second key ingredient of g7+ documents and statements. Such solidarity distinguishes itself from comparable manifestations in international organizations by its strong wording, which recalls and reshapes the diction of Third-Worldism in the Bandung era of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁵ International power relations are highlighted by the deliberate use of a small 'g' in the organization's name.⁸⁶ Membership relations are compared with family ties,⁸⁷ reflecting a 'deep bond' and a common responsibility in the members' commitment 'to their nations, their people and their partners to consolidate peace, build robust, viable and sustainable states'.⁸⁸ The g7+ has even invented a tailored application of South–South cooperation: 'fragile-to-fragile cooperation'.⁸⁹

As with colonialism in the Bandung era, shared experiences underpin these strong ties. 'The reality of our existence as conflict-affected states often comes into play whenever we try to meet.'⁹⁰ Fragility shapes both the specific context and the vision of g7+ countries. Context develops into an important feature,⁹¹ as exposed by the collectively perceived failure of development assistance that was 'often inconsistent with local priorities',⁹² or the need to adjust the implementation of democracy to 'local circumstances'.⁹³ Thus solidarity comes to be closely linked with embracing non-liberal traditions, particularly in the execution of political power, that are seen as essential for the establishment of 'resilient nations'.⁹⁴

Considerable force would be necessary to shake the solidarity among g7+ members. Even in times of full-blown civil war with national governments acting as drivers of conflict, such as in South Sudan since 2013 or in the Central African Republic in 2014, the g7+ does not merely 'empathise with the people', but proclaims 'to stand in solidarity with the government . . . in those countries'.⁹⁵ Consciously contradicting the sceptical tone in statements by international actors, such a proclamation of solidarity echoes the deliberate repetition by a South Sudanese official at a g7+ meeting of a phrase in the organization's charter: 'nothing about us, without us'.⁹⁶ Without doubt, this statement refers to the government level.

In contrast to the heyday of Third-Worldism, however, the g7+'s discourse does not explicitly refer to colonialism, post-colonial resistance or changing the world order. Instead, it injects notions of solidarity into development language and liberal internationalism, linking them with a sense of international power play: 'Given the principle of solidarity, the g7+ will always advocate peace and

⁸⁵ See Mark T. Berger, 'After the Third World? History, destiny and the fate of Third Worldism', *Third World Quarterly* 25: 1, 2004, pp. 9–39.

⁸⁶ Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, p. 12.

⁸⁷ Helder Da Costa, 'g7+ and the New Deal: country-led and country-owned initiatives—a perspective from Timor-Leste', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 7: 2, 2012, pp. 96–102 at p. 97.

⁸⁸ Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, p. 5; Da Costa, 'g7+ and the New Deal', p. 97.

⁸⁹ g7+, 'g7+ policy note on fragile-to-fragile cooperation', 2015, <http://www.g7plus.org/sites/default/files/basic-page-downloads/g7%2B-Policy-Note-on-Fragile-to-Fragile-Cooperation-English.pdf>; g7+, *Annual Report 2014–2015*, p. 12.

⁹⁰ *Annual Report 2014–2015*, p. 101.

⁹¹ See e.g. g7+, 'g7+ statement, Dili, 10 April 2010', p. 3; see also Hearn, *Independent review of the New Deal*, p. 28.

⁹² Marah, 'The g7+ global perspectives', p. 9.

⁹³ g7+, 'g7+ statement, Dili, 10 April 2010', p. 1.

⁹⁴ For a classic, detailed account of such traditions and their role in sustaining political settlements in African countries, see Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa works: disorder as political instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

⁹⁵ g7+, 'The Lomé Communiqué', Lomé, Togo, 30 May 2014, <http://www.g7plus.org/en/resources/lom%C3%A9-communiqué-lom%C3%A9-togo-30-may-2014>.

⁹⁶ Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, p. 12; g7+, *g7+ Charter*, p. 1.

stability in its member countries . . . But success will also depend on the degree of trust and effort forthcoming from our partners.’⁹⁷ The g7+ is committed not only to the general idea of the necessity of peace- and statebuilding as represented by the IDPS, but also to globally endorsed development goals.⁹⁸ This is reflected in the group’s advocacy of the inclusion in the SDGs of Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions,⁹⁹ which also shows its commitment to actively engage in global governance issues.

While the discourse of the g7+ accepts international liberal norms, it no longer does so in the hypercritical way characteristic of the recipient role in a development ‘partnership’ based purely on the transfer of resources. Instead of implicitly but effectively resisting these norms, this new and more self-confident uptake of them enables a blunt and open rejection of their application on the grounds of national interest or context. Relapses into the confrontational post-colonial discourse, while still playing a certain role, are no longer a core element of the stance. In this way, the g7+’s discourse overcomes the long series of post-colonial defeats, from the debt crises to state failure, and is turned into a vehicle for a leadership claim.¹⁰⁰

Self-measurement

Measurement of peace- and statebuilding progress has developed into a main element of the g7+’s work. The New Deal established five ‘Peace and Statebuilding Goals’ (PSGs): legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and services. The IDPS partners agreed that, within a year after the New Deal’s endorsement, ‘a set of indicators for each goal will have been developed by fragile states and international partners, which will allow us to track progress at the global and the country levels’.¹⁰¹ As their key feature, these indicators should be objectively measurable.

With significant support from international experts, the g7+ engaged in developing the indicators and methods for this project, which was designed as an ‘inclusive exercise’.¹⁰² In 2012 it created a so-called ‘fragility spectrum’, which was, after a pilot assessment in South Sudan, formally launched in 2013.¹⁰³ The spectrum’s indicators are surprisingly conservative. Country-specific indicators offer a flavour of context-specificity and the opportunity for an *à la carte* approach at the country level.¹⁰⁴ However, the common indicators hardly look like the promised ‘bottom-up process’ ‘developed by fragile states, for fragile states’.¹⁰⁵ The agreed framework, consisting of 15 dimensions, representing the five PSGs, that are to be assessed along five stages signifying the way to nationhood—crisis, rebuilding and reform, transition, transformation and resilience—seems conventional at best.

This suggests that in embarking on the measurement effort, the g7+ never aimed at creating something innovative or new, or even at offering an alternative to established measurement frameworks or indices. Rather, it wanted to own the interpretation of the outcome: ‘The g7+ does not “speak out” *against* the established practice of “fragility” quantification; instead, its new

⁹⁷ Mayar, ‘g7+ policy update’, p. 99.

⁹⁸ Da Costa, ‘g7+ and the New Deal’, p. 97.

⁹⁹ Marah, ‘The g7+ global perspectives’, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ g7+, *Strength in fragility*, p. 17; see also the political statements in g7+, ‘What is the New Deal? The g7+ questions and answers’, 7 May 2013, <http://www.g7plus.org/sites/default/files/resources/Question-and-Answer-of-g7%2B.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ IDPS, ‘A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’.

¹⁰² IDPS, *Guidance note on fragility assessments*, document 04, Fifth International Dialogue Working Group Meeting (Freetown, 17 June 2014), p. 2.

¹⁰³ g7+, ‘Note on the Fragility Spectrum’.

¹⁰⁴ IDPS, *Peacebuilding and statebuilding indicators: progress, interim list and next steps*, document 03, Third International Dialogue Global Meeting (Washington, DC, 19 April 2013), pp. 4–5; see also IDPS, *New Deal monitoring report 2014*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ g7+, ‘Note on the Fragility Spectrum’, p. 3.

proposals aim to establish a better hold of “numerical claims”.¹⁰⁶ The core purpose is the issue of ownership in the sense of self-measurement, while ‘shifting the accountability for established targets and aid interventions to donors’.¹⁰⁷

Self-measurement offers g7+ countries two viable options: either to apply a creative style of measuring in order to achieve the desired outcome, or to demand further international support if the assessment shows a lack of progress. The abovementioned fragility assessment for South Sudan is a striking example of the first approach. Barely a year before the continuous struggle within the South Sudanese fragile elite settlement exploded into another civil war, the country assessed itself as being in a ‘rebuild and reform’ stage. The inclusiveness of the political settlement showed particularly good results.¹⁰⁸ The main indicator presented in this assessment was ‘diversity in representation in key-decision making bodies’, measured by the proxy ‘women in politics’.¹⁰⁹ Whereas this benchmark continues to be popular among international partners, it was hardly a sufficient indicator to reflect the level of factionalism within South Sudanese elites.

How lack of progress towards the PSGs is conceptualized is even more revealing. For instance, fragility assessments include indicators such as ‘political and social and economic oppression’, ‘power is based on force’, ‘majority of public community do not feel free to participate in all political processes’, ‘there are no checks and balances on the executive’ and ‘lack of inclusive or agreed political settlement’.¹¹⁰ Assessments of these indicators are to be organized and conducted by the governments of the respective states themselves, bolstered with the formal international legitimacy provided by the IDPS. In effect, governments are tasked with measuring their own failure. Even if oppressive governments were to publicly admit to failing on these indicators, the only consequence they would have to face in this framework is the possible discontinuation of international assistance.

The g7+ and the construction of post-liberal sovereignty

These three vital elements of the g7+’s discourse could be interpreted as a radical version of ‘compromised peacebuilding’, an ‘implicit or tacit contract’ under which donor policies are accepted and implemented by partner governments in a way that does not threaten the power base of ruling elites and allows them to pursue their own political goals, while still allowing donors to account for development success.¹¹¹ The interpretation presented here, in contrast, argues that, rather than adding another level of mutual hypocrisy, the g7+ intends to create something qualitatively different and new: a post-liberal claim of sovereignty rather than a return to Westphalian sovereignty.

The relationship between the g7+ and OECD actors is no longer based on a deliberate misunderstanding, as a tacit agreement would imply, but has turned into one of the ‘hybrid forms of politics emerging from the clash between Northern and Southern epistemologies’.¹¹² The new sovereignty claim that emerges therein still accepts the principle of international responsibility and reminds international partners to act accordingly; at the same time, it transfers the ‘shared

¹⁰⁶ Isabel Rocha De Siqueira, ‘Measuring and managing “state fragility”: the production of statistics by the World Bank, Timor-Leste and the g7+’, *Third World Quarterly* 35: 2, March 2014, pp. 268–83 at p. 278.

¹⁰⁷ De Siqueira, ‘Measuring and managing “state fragility”’, p. 276.

¹⁰⁸ Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GoSS), *Fragility assessment, Republic of South Sudan 2012: summary results* (Juba: GoSS, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ GoSS, *Fragility assessment*.

¹¹⁰ g7+, ‘Note on the Fragility Spectrum’, pp. 14–16.

¹¹¹ Michael Barnett and Christoph Zürcher, ‘The peacebuilder’s contract: how external statebuilding reinforces weak statehood’, in Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, eds, *The dilemmas of statebuilding: confronting the contradictions of postwar peace operations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 23–52 at p. 25.

¹¹² David Chandler and Oliver Richmond, ‘Contesting postliberalism: governmentality or emancipation?’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18: 1, pp. 1–24 at p. 11.

responsibility' of international statebuilding into a 'mutual responsibility' that denies any conditionality. Sovereignty is effectively 'unshared'.

The g7+ post-liberal counter-vision rests on two pillars. First, the nation-state once again becomes the focus of political action. By transferring resilience from the societal level of communities and people to the ideational level of the nation, all government action becomes justifiable, irrespective of any conflict with international obligations. Nevertheless, the general acceptance of liberal norms remains, rendering the resulting sovereignty claim not anti-liberal, but truly post-liberal. The second pillar of the counter-vision provides the necessary underpinning for this to work: liberal norms need to be contextualized and effectively owned, without being tied to the associated obligations.¹¹³ The need for ownership without obligations explains the importance given to measurement: contextualized and state-controlled measurement allows the *ownership of the application* of global liberal norms, a smart way of abiding by them without having to implement them.

Constructivist scholars emphasize that sovereignty is, and has always been, a contingent matter of mutual perception and recognition, since it is a product of social norms and practices.¹¹⁴ The new rendering of sovereignty promoted by the g7+ and its member states confirms this insight. It neither simply rejects the responsibility-based sovereignty conceptions of liberal peace- and statebuilding by bluntly endorsing Westphalian sovereignty nor unconditionally embraces them. Instead, the sovereignty claim raised combines both of these approaches—the traditional elements of post-colonial sovereignty as well as the liberal responsibilities of states as they are endorsed at the international level. The unconditional, legal element of those responsibilities, however, is made subject to a wide array of conditions, political, economic and contextual. The interpretation of liberal responsibility as entailing unconditional rights and obligations is rejected, as is the 'shared' international responsibility deriving from them. This characterizes the 'unsharing' of sovereignty as a post-liberal enterprise.

Post-liberal sovereignty re-emphasizes the central role of the nation-state as the key actor at the international stage. Accordingly, the post-liberal endeavours of international actors, which abandon attempts to foster liberal statehood in order to focus on local agency, are dismissed. In turn, the fragile nation-state is reinvented as a responsible international partner, which logically requires the exclusive ownership of its responsibilities. The application and interpretation of all liberal norms and principles is transferred back to the national domain. As post-liberal sovereignty holds on to the general principles of liberal internationalism, it reaches beyond pure Westphalian sovereignty. Yet the now unshared character of state responsibility naturally opposes any attempt at delivering political and military support or intervention that is not explicitly invited.

Conclusions

The analysis presented above has shown that the g7+ group of fragile and conflict-affected states is more than either a 'donor darling' in current international efforts at peace- and statebuilding or a mere grouping of desperate states that everyone 'wants to leave as quickly as possible'.¹¹⁵ The organization and its potential have as yet been remarkably underestimated, particularly in IR. In its short existence, the g7+ has substantially modified the relationship between the OECD member

¹¹³ Here, the claim made by the g7+ chimes with contemporary post-liberal political philosophy. John Gray, for example, argues that liberal political thought has failed to prove 'that liberal democracy is the only form of human government that can be sanctioned by reason and morality': see John Gray, *Post-liberalism: studies in political thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 246.

¹¹⁴ David A. Lake, 'The new sovereignty in International Relations', *International Studies Review* 5: 3, Sept. 2003, pp. 303–23 at pp. 307–9.

¹¹⁵ Kamitatu Etsu, a politician in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, quoted in Wyeth, 'Knights in fragile armor', p. 9.

states and states in the global South. It has transformed state- and peacebuilding, with possibly far-reaching implications.

Embedded in an environment characterized an increasing availability of financial resources, and potential support from an increasingly wide array of international actors, states and institutions, donor–recipient relationships will not unravel, as traditional emancipatory approaches such as post-colonialism would suggest. Rather, their character is undergoing fundamental change. Using the three elements of resilience, solidarity and self-measurement, the g7+ aims to establish full government responsibility in all areas related to peace and statehood. Framed as an exercise of national ownership, post-liberal sovereignty is practised as an ‘unshared’, exclusive enterprise. It is qualitatively different from peace- and statebuilding as an organized hypocrisy, in which all sides pursued their own interests within a common framework. Post-liberal sovereignty is a deliberate and strategic move towards reconfiguring global power constellations.

This strategic endeavour has implications at several levels. At the local level, the effort to turn international peace- and statebuilding interventions into a more political and bottom-up enterprise is rejected by the g7+’s discourse. Donor interventions in political processes are confronted with an outspoken and self-confident notion of national control: ‘We as a cabinet decided to strive for one thing internationally: Inclusive politics must be globalized before it is localized.’¹¹⁶

At the international level, global liberal governance, which plays a fundamental role in the field of aid and intervention,¹¹⁷ is at stake. Its institutions face an increasingly manifest counter-concept, which already shows itself in other variations—among them, the current opposition to the International Criminal Court in sub-Saharan Africa, vocally supported by g7+ member countries. Fragile states, while commonly referred to as the weakest of the weak, show a willingness to take their fate back into their own hands, irrespective of absent institutional capacity, or the lack of political will to enact liberal statehood internally.

Normatively, post-liberal sovereignty is difficult to counter for actors who subscribe to liberal norms, since it takes up the general demand of national ownership that has repeatedly been urged within the international development discourse. This does not imply the immediate end of liberal internationalism and development interventionism. While the most radical applications of global liberal governance are unlikely to exercise sustainable traction under these new conditions, other elements, such as development partnerships, will continue to be implemented. Nonetheless, the structural framework of these elements will become one of fully fledged multipolarity, its predominant quality the fluidity of partnerships.

From being the main avenue of change, liberal internationalism or development policy interventions turn into one option that may—or may not—be accepted by partners. From now on, international engagement, however humble and local, will always be under contestation and required to take account of partner demands. The times of tacit agreements are all but over, as also, it seems, are the times of development partnerships based on donor-assessed needs. While this may be uncomfortable for the OECD world, the decision not to accept external assistance is in line with the discourse of development and liberal statebuilding. Ownership also entails the choice *not* to own. Post-liberal sovereignty is built on this choice. While this is hardly illegitimate, it waters down international accountability, with potentially grim consequences.

¹¹⁶ Pires, *Building peaceful states against all odds*, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Mark Duffield, ‘Social reconstruction and the radicalization of development: aid as a relation of global liberal governance’, *Development and Change* 33: 5, Nov. 2002, pp. 1049–71.